

# Venturi and Scott Brown as Functionalists: Venustas and the Decorated Shed

---

DENISE R. COSTANZO

## Abstract

Although Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown famously critique functionalism in writings such as *Learning from Las Vegas*, they also claim to be latter-day adherents. Their theoretical category of the decorated shed is intended to promote and accommodate a flexible, honest and complete approach to architectural function that includes the direct consideration of its visual dimension, returning architecture to all three legs of the Vitruvian triad. One challenge in acknowledging Venturi and Scott Brown as practicing functionalists is clarifying what exactly they mean by this term. Another is discerning how their idea of function is expressed architecturally in the decorated shed model and in their built work. In particular, their building envelopes embody tensions inherent to their notion of aesthetics as a necessary but distinct function. These skins are burdened with conflicting imperatives of practical enclosure and immaterial signification, embodying and challenging the expected image of 'functionalist' architecture.